

(Milwaukee, WI)- Congresswoman Gwen Moore announced today that Regina Bakala, an activist for democracy and a refugee from the Congo, has been granted permission to stay in the United States while her appeal for political asylum to avoid deportation is processed. Congresswoman Moore had asked for expedited consideration of this request with a letter to the immigration board. Had the motion to stay in the country not been granted, Ms. Bakala would have been deported and returned to the Congo next Wednesday, where it is almost certain she would have been the target of violence. Regardless of the strength of Ms. Bakala's case, deportation would have effectively ended her fight for political asylum, as she would be located outside the jurisdiction of the United States.

"Regina Bakala has spent a good portion of her life promoting democracy and the very ideals that make our country great," said Congresswoman Moore. "It would be morally unjust to send her back to an environment where those who advocate democracy are targeted for attack, where rape of women is used as a political tool, and where it is doubtful that Ms. Bakala would be allowed to live unharmed."

Congresswoman Moore has been heavily involved in Ms. Bakala's case, initially by writing a letter requesting that Ms. Bakala be permitted to live and work in the community while her appeal was pending. Congresswoman Moore encouraged members of Ms. Bakala's parish to galvanize community support for their efforts to prevent her deportation. Further, Congresswoman Moore worked with officials at the Bureau of Immigration Appeals to seek reconsideration for Ms. Bakala's case.

In response to Congresswoman Moore's request for an expedited decision, three board members reviewed her file. Board members found evidence that her appeal has a chance in court based on arguments of standing and ability to persuade. As a result of this finding, the motion to stay was granted.

After living in the United States for 10 years, Ms. Bakala was taken into custody unexpectedly on March 22 and has been held at a detention center since then. Her two children, ages four and five, are of American citizenship and attend St. Mary's in Hales Corners. The St. Mary's Parish has been very active in supporting her release. Members of the parish, along with supporters from throughout the Milwaukee area, greeted news of her stay with relief and joy.

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